

## **Team BMG East Buttress Mount Laurens** (Alaska Expedition (May-June 2016) Report) MEF Ref: 16-29

### **Original Objectives:**

1<sup>st</sup> ascent of the 1400m East Buttress of Mount Laurens 3061m, Lacuna Glacier

1<sup>st</sup> British Ascent of the Infinite Spur 2800m, Mount Foraker 5304m



### **Team Members**

**John Crook** (IFMGA Aspirant Guide)



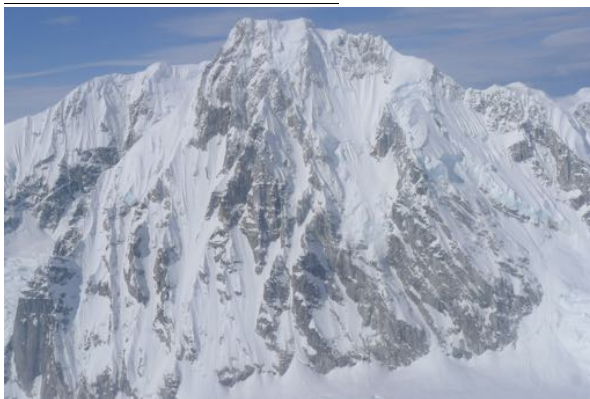
**Dave Sharpe** (IFMGA Aspirant Guide)



**Gavin Pike** (IFMGA Guide)



**Part 1: Mount Laurens**



5<sup>th</sup> May – Left Europe

7<sup>th</sup> May – Arrived in Talkeetna (storms in mountains)

1<sup>st</sup> we were forced to take a couple of days fattening up on American over eating and researching planned objectives. A chance meeting with Mark Allen at the baggage weigh in provided us with lots of information on Mount Laurens. Mark made up half of the only other team known to have completed climbing on Mount Laurens and probably in the whole of the Lacuna Glacier. His very helpful insights included the fact that if certain parts of the face were dry he believed the rock climbing required may amount to 5.12 standard (ie, a little harder than you'd wish for on a 1400m alpine face!

9<sup>th</sup> May - flew in to Kahiltna Base camp (vis still too poor for Lacuna landing)

11<sup>th</sup> May – Bump flight over.

East Buttress of Mount Laurens looked far too dry on fly by. Landed near a nice looking face to the West of Laurens above the Yetna Glacier.

13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> May – Reccy and climbing

Having made a reccy of the area on skis we selected a nice looking 900m high face to climb. While preparing gear, however, we realised that parts of the route had begun to disappear before our eyes and spindrift was present on the face! The objective was still 2 miles from Base camp, so we decided to take a closer look.



Spending the following day below the face we found that in the sun of the afternoon the face became very active with avalanches raining down it! We made an attempt to cross the bergschrund at midnight, thinking we may have a chance of climbing the face safely at night. The sound of running water below the snow and lacking a re-freeze, we deemed the face too dangerous and re-treated.

16<sup>th</sup> May – The weather and foreseeable forecast was far too warm (the warmest Spring on record in Alaska!) and conditions too dangerous to climb at this altitude, so we were flown

over to Denali to acclimatise for higher climbing. A 1<sup>st</sup> British Ascent of the Infinite Spur being our main plan.

### **Acclimatisation**

16<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> May – acclimatised on Denali, W Buttress, with lots of snow and poor weather.

We quickly collected supplies and loaded sledges, heading straight for 11000 camp on the West Buttress of Denali, arriving late on the night of the 16<sup>th</sup> (morning 17<sup>th</sup>)

On the 17<sup>th</sup> we left sledges stashed and had a beautiful day skinning very heavy loads up to 14000ft camp

We were pinned down at 14000ft camp for several days with very poor weather, lots of snow, also not helped by unreliable weather forecasts.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> May, sick of being tent bound, we glanced out to see clear skies, so readied ourselves for an assault up the West Buttress. Starting in freezing cold temperatures, we all progressed to 17000ft camp without too much delay. At this point Gavin decided he was feeling the altitude enough for our acclimatisation mission, leaving Dave and myself to continue. The weather quickly deteriorated to a much colder version of Scotland, with progress only being viewed as acceptable, due to the line of wands leading up the West Buttress in to the white room. The 2<sup>nd</sup> time we climbed in to our shelter at 6000m, we deemed enough to be enough and re-treated.



Unfortunately we were pinned down for a final 3 days by bad weather at 14000ft camp, before being able to descend back to Kahiltna basecamp.

29<sup>th</sup> May – Climbed Kahiltna Queen

It felt good to get out and climb something. The weather was great and the views all round were insanely beautiful, especially the view of the South face of Denali.



**Infinite Spur Attempt**

31<sup>st</sup> May-4<sup>th</sup> June – Attempt Infinite Spur

After descending off the West Buttress on Denali we all felt ready to try the Infinite Spur. We were also aware that on such a huge isolated face, we really wanted 6 days of good weather. The potential results of being caught out high on Foraker in a big Alaskan storm were unthinkable.

By the 31<sup>st</sup> May, we were getting very itchy feet and felt tired of the unreliable weather forecasts we were getting, so we traversed round to below the face, skiing half the way and making the other half of the approach on foot. We “camped” on the foot of the Spur, before the bowl at the foot of the face.



On the 1<sup>st</sup> June we crossed the bergschrund on to the face at about 4am (just behind Colin Haley) and made good progress up the snowfield, arching round to the right. On reaching the rock bands, we continued climbing some brilliant mixed ground in a very dramatic setting. We reached the top of the snowfield at about 1000m on the face by mid afternoon. We were aware this was due to be our last good bivvy site for the next 1000m and with the snow already falling, from apparently another band of weather, we decided to get comy in our BD 1<sup>st</sup> light tent.

2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> June

It's fair to say that the space in our little tent was rather tight for 3 big guys. Only topping and tailing on your side made it possible. Unfortunately the persistent snow-fall, put us at the mercy of intermittent spindrift avalanches. Clearing the snow from these little terror slides, along with the occasional pee, were the only breaks from our horizontal world. The other problem was that still warm temperatures, combined with our combined body warmth, led to a little melting and puddles began to form in the tent, clumping our down together!

After 36 hours in this discomfort, with 3ft of fresh snow and no signs of the weather letting up, we decided to leave!



A careful retreat was made in to the white below, making sure to hug the ridge, in order to avoid the avalanches that rained down. Once the bergschrund was crossed a quick swim was made through the new snow to safety.

From here, retreat back over 3 cols, picking our skis up on route, completed our 20 hour day back to Kahiltna base camp.

6<sup>th</sup> June – flew to Talkeetna

13<sup>th</sup> June – arrived back in the UK

### **Expedition costs**

Denali Foraker Permits \$370 x 3 = \$1110 =	847 pounds
Flights 1400 x 3 =	4231 pounds
Accommodation =	311 pounds
Insurance =	997 pounds
Equipment =	1896 pounds
Transfers =	382 pounds
Food / supplies =	1000 pounds

***Total = 9664 pounds***

### **Expedition Funding**

***1200 pounds*** from the Mount Everest Foundation

Equipment and clothing from **RAB**

A huge thanks must be given to both the MEF and RAB for help with this expedition.

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***<https://www.facebook.com/johncrookguiding/>***